



Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever

What is Rocky Mountain spotted fever?

Rocky Mountain spotted fever is a disease caused by the bacterium *Rickettsia rickettsii* (rick-ETT-cee-uh rick-ETT-cee-eye), which is carried by ticks. People usually start having fevers and feeling nauseous about a week after being bitten by a tick, although some people do not remember having had a tick bite. A few days after the fever begins, people who have Rocky Mountain spotted fever often have a rash, usually on their arms or ankles. They also may have pain in their joints, stomach pain, and diarrhea. Sometimes people with this disease are very sick and have to go to the hospital. The disease can be difficult to diagnose in the early stages, and without prompt and appropriate treatment it can be fatal. Rocky Mountain spotted fever is the most severe and most frequently reported rickettsial illness in the United States. It also occurs in Mexico and in Central and South America.

Can animals transmit Rocky Mountain spotted fever to me?

Yes, but not directly. People get this disease when they are bitten by a tick that is carrying the bacterium *R. rickettsia*. Because ticks on dogs can be infected with *R. rickettsii*, dogs and people can get Rocky Mountain spotted fever from the same ticks. These ticks can also bite other animals and pass Rocky Mountain spotted fever to them. When you remove ticks from any animal, the crushed tick or its parts can also pass this disease through any cuts or scrapes on your skin.

How can I protect myself from getting Rocky Mountain spotted fever from my pets?

- When returning from potentially tick-infested areas, check yourself and your children for ticks, especially in the hair. Additionally, ticks may be carried into the household on clothing and pets. Both should be examined carefully.
- To prevent ticks from getting on your pets, consult your veterinarian.

Fast Facts

- ~ 250 – 1,200 cases reported annually
- Most cases occur in eastern U.S.
- Sporadic in Rocky Mtn west (3-5% cases)
- First rec. 1896 in Snake River Valley, ID
- Dreaded disease called "Black Measles"
- Fatal 30%+ cases (un-tx)

Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever Rash

- Rash appears 2-5 days after onset
- Macules– spots – wrists, forearms, ankles
- Spots can become raised (non-itchy)
- Rash spreads to trunk, etc.
- Petechial rash (60%)–may not appear until 6 days after onset, or not at all (10+ %)
- Rash usually involves palms and soles
- Delayed rash = delayed dx = delayed rx

Prevention

- Wear light colored clothes
- Tuck pants into socks
- Apply DEET repellents
- Conduct tick checks
- Remove ticks properly
- Save ticks for ID
- Control ticks on pets

Removing Ticks Properly

- Use tweezers to grasp tick by mouthparts
- Pull gently straight-out
- Avoid squeezing or crushing the tick
- Wash the bite site w/ soap and water
- Do not use hot matches, cigarettes, fingernail polish, petroleum jelly, etc. to remove or suffocate the tick
- Save the tick for species ID

For more information contact your local health department or:



Arizona Department of Health Services
Bureau of Epidemiology & Disease Control
Office of Infectious Disease Services
Vector-Borne and Zoonotic Diseases
150 N. 18th Avenue, Suite 140
Phoenix, Arizona 85007
Tel: (602) 364-4562 Fax: (602) 364-3198
Toll free: (800) 314-9243

Arizona website: www.azdhs.gov/phs/oids/vector/index.htm
CDC Website: http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/submenus/sub_rmsf.htm